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A regional task force charged with coming up with ways to improve area transportation voted Wednesday to revamp the RTA and give more power to the governor, setting the stage for a legislative fight between suburban lawmakers and Chicagoans.

The Northeastern Illinois Regional Transportation Task Force, in its final meeting, also voted to combine Pace and Metra and create a universal fare card.

Though the recommendations must still go to the General Assembly for a vote, proposals for a revamped Regional Transportation Authority and a new umbrella transportation agency for planning and land use already have brought charges of power grabs and partisan politics.

"This task force is a facade for a blatant power and money grab," said Woodstock Mayor Alan Cornue, a non-voting task force member.

The recommendation to expand the role of the RTA is expected to pit lawmakers who represent the city and who are Democrats against their suburban, Republican counterparts, critics charge.

"The suburbs lost the battle, but the war is not over," said state Rep. Sidney Mathias (R-Buffalo Grove), a task force member who voted against the plan.

As part of the proposal to revamp the RTA, the governor, with the approval of the state Senate, would appoint an RTA chairman who would act as a CEO for a four-year-term. That person would control the agency's purse strings and run day-to-day operations. The board now appoints the chairman, who traditionally has been from the suburbs.

The number of people on the RTA board, which oversees the Chicago Transit Authority, Pace

and Metra, would be increased by two members to 15.

The vote provoked a warning from non-voting member U.S. Rep. Mark Kirk (R-Ill.), who said federal officials may look with disfavor at the state legislature when it comes to earmarking federal transportation funds.

"The governor and the state legislature cannot ignore half of Illinois voters. This disenfranchised suburban voters," he said.

Task Force Chairman U.S. Rep. William Lipinski (D-Ill.) defended the proposals and said the recommendations would streamline services and translate to better service for commuters. He denied suburbanites would get short shrift.

Lipinski said he did not believe people in Chicago, suburban Cook County and the collar counties share the views of opponents. "We have given the collar counties representation on the RTA board and on the Metra board that they never had before," he said.

Under another plan by the 22-member task force, a Regional Policy Board would be set up that merges the Northeastern Illinois Planning Commission and the Chicago Area Transportation Study to oversee regional transportation issues, including land-use proposals.

The governor would appoint three people to the regional policy board while Chicago's mayor would have six appointments.

Other board members would come from county board appointments from Cook and the five collar counties and the Metropolitan Mayors Caucus.

A proposal also calls for Pace operations to be rolled under the control of Metra to deal with suburban riders.

Illinois House Speaker Michael Madigan (D-Chicago) is reserving comment until he has a chance to review the proposals, said his spokesman Steve Brown.

While state Senate President Emil Jones (D-Chicago) wants to look over the plans first, spokeswoman Cindy Davidsmeyer said, "Certainly the suburbs are in the forefront of his concerns."

In its only unanimous move during its nearly two-hour meeting, the task force also voted to create a universal fare card, allowing riders to use the same card on CTA, Metra and Pace vehicles.

The proposal, which would allow a passenger to hop from one transit service to another without paying twice, has been considered for at least five years.

"It's too long in coming," said Kirk. "It needs to happen right away."

"It's the one idea out of the task force that will visibly and notably improve the lives of commuters right away."